'Topfree Seven'

By ROCHELLE D. LEWIS
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Pornography emerged as a key issue in the trial of seven women who removed their shirts to protest a state law they say is discriminatory and unconstitutional.

"In this culture, breasts are idealized and fetishized," said Dr. Melissa Farley, an Iowa City psychologist. "In effect, women are turned into a breast or a breast thing."

Farley blamed pornography, in part, for the unhealthy obsession with breasts and said that it has caused the victimization of women.

Farley, one of many expert witnesses, testified yesterday before City Court Judge Herman J. Walz in the trial of the women, who call themselves the "Topfree Seven."

Charged with exposure of person after they bared their breasts at Cobbs Hill Park on June 21 were Mary Lou Schloss, Nikki Craft, Ramona Santorelli, Kathie Reilly, Deborah Seymour, Elise Tooley and Lynn Zicari.

The defense contends, among other things, that the state statute prohibiting women, but not men, from going shirtless violates their constitutional right to equal protection under the law, while promoting an "unhealthy obsession with breasts as sexual objects."

Assistant District Attorney Thomas J. Brilbeck maintains that this is a simple case about a group of women who violated a state law by baring their breasts.

"If cultural practices were to change and women's breasts became every day, commonplace, then it wouldn't be possible to exploit them," Farley said. "We would see ulimately ... the normalization of women's bodies."

Other witnesses, publishers of naturalist literature, testified that there are many clothing-optional beaches and partially nude beaches throughout the world, in the country and in New York. They testified that they had witnessed no violence against women as a result, even in areas where the beaches were not sanctioned by the municipality as a nude or partially nude beach.

Three of the seven defendants testified they had hoped, by participating in the shirtfree demonstration, to not only protest the state law, but also to educate the public.

"When these women exposed their breasts in public, they were reclaiming their breasts as a part of their body and as an educational process," Farley testified yesterday. "The act of removing a shirt does not cause violence. What causes violence is objectification."

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